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NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE

Soviet Strategic Objectives

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SOVIET STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

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THIS ESTIMATE IS ISSUED BY THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE.

THE NATIONAL FOREIGN INTELLIGENCE BOARD CONCURS, EXCEPT AS NOTED IN THE TEXT, AS FOLLOWS:

The following intelligence organizations participated in the preparation of the Estimate:

The Central Intelligence Agency, the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, Defense, and Treasury, the National Security Agency, and the Energy Research and Development Administration.

Concurring:

The Deputy to the Director of Central Intelligence for the Intelligence Community, Vice Chairman
The Deputy Director of Central Intelligence representing the Central Intelligence Agency
The Director of Intelligence and Research representing the Department of State
The Director, Defense Intelligence Agency
The Director, National Security Agency
The Deputy Assistant Administrator for National Security, Energy Research and Development Administration

Abstaining:

The Special Assistant to the Secretary for National Security, Department of the Treasury
The Assistant Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation

Also Participating:

The Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army
The Director of Naval Intelligence, Department of the Navy
The Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, Department of the Air Force

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FOREWORD

This Estimate is a summary analysis of how the Soviet leaders perceive the USSR's position and prospects in the world and what objectives underlie their foreign and military policies. It draws on a number of other Estimates, listed below, which provide much more detailed discussions of the major components of this question. Along with a large measure of agreement, this Estimate sets forth some differences of view within the Intelligence Community; these are summarized in the final section entitled Synthesis. In most cases, we have not attempted to attribute specific views to individual agencies; differences exist within agencies as well as among them.

NIE 11-3/8-76, Soviet Forces for Intercontinental Conflict
Through the Mid-1980s

NIE 11-5-75, The Soviet Assessment of the US

NIE 11-10-76, Soviet Military Policy in the Third World

NIE 11-14-75, Warsaw Pact Forces Opposite NATO

NIE 11-15-74, Soviet Naval Policy and Programs

NIAM 11-9-74, Soviet Detente Policy

IIM 76-039J, Trends in Soviet Military Programs

IIM 76-041J, Soviet Civil Defense

This Estimate continues the trend of the last few years toward a more ominous interpretation of Soviet strategic objectives. The single most influential factor in this continuing reevaluation has been the fact that neither the creation of an acknowledged Soviet deterrent nor the achievement of acknowledged rough equivalence has caused any observable reduction in the trend and vigor of the Soviet program to improve the USSR's military capabilities, a program which has grown at a more or less steady pace for two decades.¹ The Intelligence Community will have as its highest priority the continuing collection and examination of evidence bearing on these questions and the many subquestions that underlie them.

¹ The Director, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State believes that this paragraph lacks the balance reflected in the body of the Estimate. He would note *inter alia* that Soviet strategic force modernization programs must be viewed in the context of the Soviets trying to move ahead of the US and to achieve advantages where possible, but at the same time worrying that they may fall behind in the qualitative military competition.

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SOVIET STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

KEY JUDGMENTS ²

A. This Estimate addresses two closely related questions:

- Do the Soviet leaders now base policy—and the programs and activities which flow therefrom—on a belief that the USSR will continue to make substantial gains toward a position of overall dominance in the world? Do they now expect to achieve such a position in the next ten years?
- Have they come to believe—or will they soon—that aggressive actions on their part carry lower risks than earlier, and that these risks have become low enough to be acceptable to prudent yet ambitious men?

B. There is in the Intelligence Community agreement on some matters relevant to these questions and disagreement on others. Among the areas of agreement:

- The aims of Soviet global policy are far-reaching. The Soviet leaders' basic perception of the world still posits a struggle of two great systems, in which theirs will ultimately prevail. This outlook is reinforced by both defensive and expansionist impulses derived from Russia's history and boosted by the remarkable growth of Soviet power and prestige since World War II. Neither in its foreign policy nor its military policy does the USSR aim at long-term equilibrium between the two systems; instead it seeks a continual enhancement of its own power and influence.
- In prosecuting the struggle on multiple fronts, the Soviets see military power as a key instrument which can be used to attain strategic objectives without war.
- The Soviets have never accepted the concept of mutual assured destruction, with its connotation that some finite level of force is sufficient for deterrence, although they recognize mutual deterrence as a present reality that will be very difficult to alter. Moreover, trying to forge ahead of the US and at the same time

² The Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, Department of the Air Force believes the frequent use of such words as fear, anxiety, worry, caution, and concern to describe the state of mind of the Soviet leadership is overdone. He warns the reader that he should not let this excessive use of these words distract from the obvious determination and drive of the Soviet leadership to achieve strategic military superiority.

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fearful of falling behind it, they are little disposed to adjust their military programs unilaterally so as to foster strategic stability, or to moderate them lest they provoke US program reactions.

- The Soviets aim at advantage in their military forces. They continue to press forward with a broad and vigorous program for improving their military capabilities to support their political objectives.
- The striking thing about these programs is not that they have accelerated in the last few years but that they have grown at a more or less steady pace for two decades. We expect this growth to continue. Neither the creation of an acknowledged deterrent nor the achievement of acknowledged strategic parity has caused the effort to falter. Soviet military doctrine calls for capabilities to fight, survive, and win a nuclear war.
- At the same time, the Soviets worry that they may fall behind in the qualitative military competition, and this further reinforces the priority of their research and development effort.
- In the struggle, they are conscious of weaknesses on their own side, particularly those arising from economic and technological deficiencies and conflict with China. They are working to overcome these weaknesses, but they do not presently expect to remove them in the next decade.
- On the other hand, beyond their obvious military strength, they credit themselves with other important assets: disciplined policy-making, social cohesion, and perseverance.

*So does much
US military doctrine
what is the
political
leadership's
judgment*

C. Among our major disagreements:

- Some judge that the Soviets are persuaded that the US and the West, despite periodic rebounds, are in a long-term decline that will be reflected in a flagging of political resolve, military efforts, and economic growth. Others think the Soviets hope for this but do not count on it, and indeed may think that US and Western military effort is again on the rise.
- Some believe that, in improving their military forces, the Soviets pursue the acquisition of a war-winning capability as a realistic objective. Others believe that the Soviets have no realistic expectation of attaining such a capability.

These disagreements lead to conclusions that, while not diametrically opposed, present significant differences of emphasis.

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D. One line of argument holds that, in the Soviet view, the global correlation of forces has in the 1970s shifted in the USSR's favor and that this trend is likely to continue. The US and its allies have entered upon a new stage in the "general crisis of capitalism" that will prove irreversible even if there are periodic recoveries. The problems of the Soviet economy and the dispute with China are serious but, on the plane of international competition, not debilitating. In this situation, the Soviets aim to achieve the degree of military superiority over the West needed to permit them to wage, survive as a national entity, and win a conventional or nuclear war. The Soviets see their improvements in survivability and in counterforce capabilities, air defense and ABM development, and broad hardening and civil defense programs in particular, and their improvements in conventional forces in general, as all contributing to this objective. While it is uncertain when the Soviets expect to gain such a decisive strategic superiority, they view this objective as practical and attainable in a programmed fashion. They expect to move closer to this goal over the next ten years. This trend, they believe, will increasingly enable them to deter US initiatives and to inhibit US opposition to Soviet initiatives, thereby advancing the Soviet objective of gaining a position of overall dominance in the world.

E. Another line of argument holds that, in Soviet thinking, the question is much more open. It too perceives an increased Soviet confidence, stemming much more from the achievement of parity in strategic forces than from other, nonmilitary trends. But this analysis holds that the Soviet leaders give greater weight than the preceding argument allows to the handicaps represented by the USSR's economic and technological weaknesses and its conflict with China. It believes that they attribute greater resilience to the capitalist economies and do not discount the recent turnaround in US defense spending as a short-term phenomenon. In this view, Soviet military programing and research is bent upon keeping pace with that of its adversaries as well as seeking margins of advantage wherever feasible. But Moscow does not have a realistic expectation of achieving a war-winning capability, particularly in the next decade. Expecting Soviet foreign policy to be assertive, this analysis nonetheless holds that Moscow's experience with the complexities of the external world does not at this point lead the Soviets to expect a series of advances that, by the mid-1980s, will cumulate into a finally decisive shift in the struggle. In short, this analysis attributes to the Soviets not a programmatic design for military superiority but a more pragmatic effort to achieve advantages where they can, and thus a more patient approach to continuing tough

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competition together with a dedication to high and steady levels of effort in the elements of power. Moscow's calculus of the risks attending forward action may decline, but this has not yet happened and, if it does, the process will be slow and subject to cautious testing.

F. This Estimate is obviously not a net assessment, nor our judgment of the likely outcome in East-West competition. It is a summary of the range of Community perceptions of Soviet objectives and Soviet views of the prospects for significant gains in this competition. We agree on a wide range of Soviet objectives short of decisive military superiority over the West. Our differences are over the Soviet leaders' perception of the feasibility of achieving such superiority. Finally, we agree that Soviet risk-taking abroad in any specific situation will continue to be governed by Moscow's perception of interests and power at the particular time and place.

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THE PROBLEM

To analyze the strategic objectives underlying Soviet military and foreign policy, with particular attention to the next ten years.

THE ESTIMATE

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The aims of Soviet global policy are far-reaching. The Soviet leaders' basic perception of the world still posits a struggle of two great systems, in which theirs will ultimately prevail. This ideological outlook is reinforced by both defensive and expansionist impulses derived from Russia's history and boosted by the remarkable growth of Soviet power and prestige since World War II. Neither in its foreign policy nor its military policy does the USSR aim at long-term equilibrium between the two systems; instead it seeks a continual enhancement of its own power and influence.

2. If there is disagreement in the Intelligence Community, it is not over this basic judgment. Nor is there real dispute over the important corollary that the Soviet leaders are prudent men, prone to minimize risks and to seek to advance only when they judge the chance of success to be high. Current disagreements focus instead on two sets of questions:

- Has the last decade, to the Soviet leaders, been a watershed, a period of decisive change in the competition of systems? Do they believe that their programs and activities will lead in a systematic fashion to the achievement of military-strategic superiority and a position of overall dominance in the world? Do they expect to achieve this position within the next ten years?³
- Translating this problem into the sphere of international behavior, do the Soviets judge—or

³ The Senior Intelligence Officer, Energy Research and Development Administration believes that the crucial issue is not whether the Soviets "succeed" or "fail" to achieve their objectives within ten years, but rather whether they make substantial gains toward their longer-range strategic objectives.

will they soon—that the USSR can push its interests harder without facing higher risks? Granting their prudence, have they come to believe—or will they soon—that aggressive actions on their part carry less risk than earlier, and in fact now have become low enough to be acceptable to prudent yet ambitious men?

3. In this Estimate, we consider the major factors that enter into Soviet calculations of these matters, touching on the Soviet appraisal of the elements of what they habitually refer to as the "correlation of forces," mainly military and economic strength, political organization and will, and social cohesion and morale. A final section seeks to define, in the light of this analysis, Soviet strategic objectives and to illuminate differences of judgment on this question.

II. MAJOR FACTORS ENTERING INTO SOVIET CALCULATIONS

The Soviet View of the USSR's Internal Situation

4. As they survey their own country, the Soviets see certain strengths and weaknesses. These factors gain meaning for their external outlook and objectives largely as they relate to Western strengths and weaknesses.

- The Soviet leaders regard their political system as strong and stable. They view political dissidence as an embarrassment to their foreign policy, not a challenge to their rule. They see nationalist sentiments among the minorities as a more serious problem, but are confident of their ability to cope with it. Succession politics may come to preoccupy them, but they do not expect succession to pose a crisis for the system.

- Beneath this genuine feeling of confidence there seems to lie an abiding worry that the Soviet system, while strong, may also be brittle. Such matters as the harping on the legitimacy of party rule, the very pervasiveness of control mechanisms, and the lively fears about the penetration of Western influence suggests a continuing anxiety about how the system might stand up to crisis. As they contemplate Eastern Europe, Soviet fears of this sort are doubtless much stronger. These concerns might be an inhibiting factor in any Soviet decision about initiating major war.⁴
- The Soviets regard their system as giving them a substantial competitive advantage. Its rigorous centralization permits little debate and altogether excludes challenge from outside a small political elite. This, they believe, makes for steady, purposeful decisionmaking and discipline and coordination in the execution of

⁴ The Director, Defense Intelligence Agency, the senior intelligence officers of the Military Departments, and the Senior Intelligence Officer, Energy Research and Development Administration believe that this formulation overstates Soviet concerns about the brittleness of their system and the extent to which fear of East European instability might inhibit the USSR in initiating a major war. They believe that the Soviet leaders recognize that their system, while strong, is also faced with internal differences and difficulties, and that stress could weaken the system. Therefore, over the years, these leaders have evolved a number of control mechanisms—including party discipline and regulations circumscribing Western influence—to ensure that these potentially debilitating elements do not become major hindrances to the USSR in the pursuit of its objectives. As the Soviets contemplate Eastern Europe, their concerns are doubtless much stronger—they have on occasion resorted to drastic measures to maintain control and are pushing economic, political, and military measures to tie the East European states closer to the USSR. All these factors would be reviewed carefully to ensure full control prior to a Soviet decision on any major action that could lead to war.

The Deputy Director of Central Intelligence believes that problems of dissent and disaffection are regarded as extremely important by the Soviets, affecting as they do not only the party leadership's political control, but Soviet relations with the West and with fraternal Communist parties as well. He believes, however, that in comparison to other inhibitions which would have to be overcome before taking so cataclysmic a step as initiating a major war, concerns about internal dissent would not have major significance. Indeed, he questions to what extent dissent in any form would survive if the USSR were placed on a war footing. He agrees that the Soviets would be more affected by misgivings about the reliability of their Warsaw Pact allies than by concerns about their own population.

policy. In particular, they regard their system as able to sustain the priority of defense at present and perhaps even higher levels of effort.

- The Soviet leaders do not discount their economic problems. They know that their agriculture is backward and that industrial productivity is low. They acknowledge a general lag in the application of advanced technology in the economic sector and fear that it may be growing. The Soviets see these problems as becoming more complex and more difficult to solve and, while they expect a moderate rate of growth, they no longer speak of overtaking the leading capitalist economies in a stated period of time.

5. Particular importance attaches to the question of whether the Soviet economy can sustain current or higher rates of growth in military spending in coming years.⁵ In addition to the general economic problems mentioned above, modern military spending is increasingly driven by the technological complexity and quality requirements of advanced weapons, and these are, in general, areas in which the Soviet economy does not enjoy an advantage over the US. The Soviet leaders worry about this problem. But it seems clear from their present military programming, and from the research and development efforts that herald production and deployment of future systems, that they do not now feel compelled to reduce the priority of defense for the sake of other economic goals. Their concentration upon military power is so strong that only severe and prolonged economic stringencies could force them to relax this priority. On this matter, the shared background and values of Soviet political and military leaders leave little room for internal dispute.

The Soviet View of Military Power and War

6. For the Soviet leaders, ideology legitimizes all means, including military means, in the prosecution of the political struggle; it also posits the danger of imperialist attack. Force plays a central role in Soviet

⁵ The Central Intelligence Agency's recently revised estimates show that the USSR has been devoting about one eighth of its gross national product to defense during the 1970s; the Director, Defense Intelligence Agency and the senior intelligence officers of the Military Departments think the share probably is higher. Research is underway to determine the corresponding ratio in the 1960s.

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thinking, and military power bulks large in Soviet policy. The Soviets explicitly state that their military doctrine—which they define as “official views and positions determining the direction of military development and the preparation of the nation and its armed forces for war”—is premised upon the notion that war is an instrument of policy, and success in war, even a nuclear war, is attainable. While there is disagreement over the extent to which military doctrine determines political decisions on military matters, we do not believe that the Soviets aim at war. In fact, they aim to avoid not only general nuclear war, but also direct armed conflict with the US that risks escalation to nuclear war. They recognize that, even if they enjoyed military advantages that seemed to constitute, in their perceptions and those of others, a general strategic superiority, nuclear attack on the USSR would put at risk all their achievements and prospects.

7. But the Soviets strongly believe that the implied or actual threat of the use of force is a way to influence the attitudes and decisions of states and to attain strategic objectives without war. Moreover, they see military power as a means of ensuring that their gains in the world will not be reversed. They intend their military might to secure their homeland and their position in Eastern Europe and to deter their opponents from interfering against those processes of political change, particularly in the Third World, that they are promoting, in part with their own military resources. With regard to North America, Western Europe, and Japan, they see their military strength as having political utility in enforcing respect for Soviet power and receptiveness to Soviet policies.

8. In a world characterized by struggle, the Soviets expect conflict, most probably arising out of local disputes but often involving the superpowers and, at least implicitly, their total military strength. In this context, Soviet military doctrine sets a goal of creating war-winning capabilities and then defines this posture as the best deterrent. The Soviets have never accepted the concept of mutual assured destruction, with its connotation that some finite level of force is sufficient for deterrence, although they recognize mutual deterrence as a present reality that will be very difficult to alter. Moreover, trying to forge ahead of the US and at the same time fearful of falling behind it, they are little disposed to adjust their military programs unilaterally so as to foster strategic stability,

or to moderate them lest they provoke US program reactions. Beyond these points, however, there are differences of view in the Intelligence Community as to whether the Soviets see as an achievable objective a strategic relationship in which they escape the constraints of mutual deterrence. These differences are discussed in paragraphs 56 and 57.

9. Finally, it is difficult, and in the end perhaps not fruitful, to try to separate offensive and defensive elements and purposes in the Soviet approach to military power, as Soviet military doctrine looks at them in an integral fashion. For example, the Soviets see nuclear weapons and the long-range means of delivering them as both offensive and defensive, in that they can attack the enemy's military forces, thereby reducing his capability to attack the USSR.

The Soviet View of the US

10. On this subject there are within the Intelligence Community points of agreement and divergence.

11. There is agreement that the Soviets admire and fear American economic capacity and technological prowess. Further, they have a respectful appreciation of US military strength, current and potential. The Soviets see the US as having considerable advantage over the USSR in the economic and military potential of the NATO Alliance in comparison with the Warsaw Pact. At the same time, they see weaknesses in US society that they attribute to the factors of individualism and materialism in American culture: a reluctance to make sacrifices for state goals and an inconstancy in policy deriving from the play of plural interests. They are scornful of what they see as a public appetite for sensation and a general disrespect for authority.

12. In foreign affairs, the Soviets see the US as enjoying great influence by virtue of its economic and military power, and they lay special stress on US ability to impose its views on its allies because of that power. In the Third World the Soviets see the US as enjoying stronger economic and political ties than they do, as well as having substantially greater potential for projection of military power. But they also clearly perceive differences between the US and its allies. And they are eager to discover how much—in the wake of Vietnam and Angola—the US is determined to uphold its interests and commitments abroad when these are challenged.

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13. The divergencies within the Intelligence Community arise from different emphasis upon these themes.

14. One line of analysis holds that the Soviets have probably concluded that the US has already passed its zenith as a competitor and that, given skillful Soviet policies, the chances are that this trend can be made irreversible. While acknowledging countervailing factors, the Soviets believe that in the long run the US will be forced by inherent defects in the American and international economy to be a progressively less effective competitor. They believe they are gradually overcoming the US advantage in technology. They expect continued long-run erosion, relative to their side, in the Western military, political, economic, social, and moral spheres. They think they will be able to plan their programs and conduct their policies in the expectation of greater opportunities resulting from this continued slow improvement in the global "correlation of forces." In particular, they see US vulnerabilities—to the denial of oil and other raw materials, among others—growing in the Third World, and they expect increasingly to be able to exploit these vulnerabilities. A final element of this interpretation of their view is, however, that the Soviets fear that as the US sees its position weakening, it may strike out to redress the balance. In this period, therefore, the Soviets require superior military forces and a careful weighing of risks.

15. Another line of analysis holds that, even when these factors are taken into account, the Soviet view of these matters is much less optimistic. It notes that nothing in the Soviet outlook posits a weakening of US advantages in the area of science and technology. Recognizing the vigor and scope of Soviet military programing, this analysis adds that, in Moscow's eyes, the US is a formidable military competitor that is seeking to improve its counterforce capabilities, and even thinking about strategic superiority, considering such US programs as the B-1, Trident, M-X ICBM, and strategic cruise missiles. It argues that the Soviets perceive indications of US recovery from the disillusionments of recent years, are impressed by the recuperative powers of the US and the world economies, and appear genuinely concerned that the current defense budget and political discourse in the US augur a more than temporary increase in competitiveness vis-a-vis the USSR. By this reading, the Soviets may hope for a continued slow improve-

ment in their relative position, but not at a pace that justifies new global calculations or substantial new departures in their own behavior.

The Soviet View of China

16. On this subject, the Intelligence Community shares some uncertainties but has no major disagreements.

17. The aims of the USSR's China policy are clear enough:

- to combat and reduce Chinese influence both among nations and within the international Communist movement;
- to limit Sino-US rapprochement;
- to exert military pressure designed to deter Chinese jabs along the border while impressing upon Chinese leaders the folly of making the Soviet Union their enemy;
- meanwhile to maintain a public posture of readiness to normalize relations against the time when Mao's successors might unfreeze China's implacable hostility.

18. The schism with China has severely heightened the Soviet sense of insecurity and undercut its ideological position. We have considerable evidence indicating that Moscow sees no prospect of a complete restoration of the relationship of the 1950s; this is our analysis as well. As for the possibility of an early amelioration of active competition, the Soviets appear to be more glum than hopeful.

19. Nevertheless, this will be the aim of Soviet policy, and indeed their tactical moves in the weeks after Mao's death have been intended to begin this process. The roots of the dispute are deep, and the USSR in its conciliatory approach is not prepared to give up the option of military pressure. But if we try to look a decade ahead, there is a good chance of some normalization, probably at the level of state relations, which would make the conflict less burdensome to Soviet global policy.

20. In military-strategic terms, however, we doubt that the Soviets during this period will judge that they can afford to reduce the forces devoted to the Chinese problem, or to exempt them from the normal pace of modernization. We feel confident that, at least, that is

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their own present outlook. And depending upon China's post-Mao course, it is entirely possible that fears of Chinese collusion with the West, or even of a stab in the back in the event of war elsewhere, will continue to burden Moscow's policy as heavily as they do today.

The Soviet View of Europe

21. Ultimately the Soviets would like to become the dominant power in Europe through the breakup of the NATO Alliance and the elimination of US influence and forces in Western Europe. Viewed in the light of what is achievable in the next decade, however, they intend to work to reduce US power and influence and to undermine the cohesion of NATO, thereby creating more room for the expansion of their own influence. The Soviets hope to manage this process in a way that avoids the emergence of West Germany or a united Europe as a strong, independent rival to their policies. Moscow's detente posture has particular application to this region, and to the related Soviet objectives of acquiring technology and credits from the developed industrial states and encouraging reduced defense efforts. The Soviets meanwhile seek military forces that will increasingly influence Western European attitudes through the reality and proximity of Soviet power.

22. While the Soviets applaud the growing strength of Communist parties in Western Europe, they are concerned about their increasing independence. They tolerate the anti-Soviet gestures of these parties only with great difficulty; they are concerned that power-sharing between Communists and non-Communists would undermine orthodoxy in Eastern Europe; they worry about a rightist backlash if the process moves too fast. On balance, however, they see more gains than losses for themselves in this trend, realize that it is not within their control, and will assist it cautiously. As for Yugoslavia, they would like to bring that country closer to their own camp after Tito's death but are also concerned to ensure that it not move westward. They may apply military pressure to this problem, but they probably see major local dangers and international risks in the actual use of force.

The Soviet View of Detente

23. In its broadest aspect, detente is looked upon as a framework for nurturing changes favorable to Soviet

interests while avoiding direct challenges to the US and its allies that would provoke them into concerted and effective countermeasures. Detente provides for limited spheres of cooperation and relaxation of tensions within a larger context of continued competition. It is meant to facilitate more specific policies designed:

- to give the West, and particularly the US, a stake in fruitful relations with the USSR as a means of limiting Western interest in collaboration with China against Soviet interests;
- to develop precedents and mechanisms for consulting with the US during crises and influencing its behavior, thereby reducing the likelihood of nuclear war;
- to develop an atmosphere that would serve to reduce public and parliamentary support for Western defense efforts;
- to create a political climate in which economic relations, and particularly a flow of Western credits and technology, can improve the Soviet economic base and provide militarily useful technologies;
- to sustain formal Western acknowledgement of the USSR's postwar gains in Eastern Europe, to extend Soviet influence in Western Europe, and to weaken alliance cohesion.

At the same time, the Soviets have stated from the outset—and emphasized recently in response to Western criticism—that detente, like “peaceful coexistence,” in no way involves a renunciation of Soviet support and assistance to “progressive forces,” including those engaging in armed struggle in the Third World, but in fact creates a political climate that enhances the prospects for these forces.

24. Since this is a fairly durable set of Soviet interests, we expect Moscow to continue to adhere to the detente line. They regard the improvement of their position, and particularly their gains in strategic weaponry, as having forced the West to accept the detente framework and enter into negotiations with the USSR. Specific policies are another matter; Moscow has been reluctant to accept Western prescriptions about the proper content of a detente relationship. The Soviets have suffered their own disappointments with it, particularly in US trade

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legislation and Middle Eastern diplomacy. They are sensitive to increasing Western skepticism about detente, and evidently would like to see this trend reversed. But their diplomacy is extremely patient, and if they do eventually make concessions to Western demands, these will usually be forthcoming only after prolonged bargaining, during which the Soviets will have thoroughly tested the Western position and discovered the response needed on their part to sustain momentum.

Arms Control Policy

25. The Soviets have both strategic and political objectives in pursuing arms control negotiations. On the political side, the USSR is assiduous in initiating proposals in this area in order to appear as the champion of disarmament and to determine as much as possible the subjects chosen for negotiations. Moscow has at times seen Soviet security objectives served simply by propaganda on possible arms control arrangements. The Soviets, for example, evidently calculate that proposals to ban use or first use of nuclear weapons might appeal to public opinion and affect Western policy and strategy even in the absence of negotiations. The very process of negotiations, the USSR believes, strengthens its image as a superpower equal to the US and increases the chances that the West will reduce the vigor of its military programs.

26. In disarmament negotiations the Soviets are zealous in protecting their military and security interests, and have a proven record of being very hard bargainers. They view SALT as a means through which the USSR may be able further to improve its strategic position vis-a-vis the US, particularly if they succeed in limiting US weapon systems now in development. In negotiating on ABM, Moscow evidently judged that, in view of the US technological lead and potential, severe limits on deployment would be to its military benefit. The Soviets have sought to use MBFR largely as a vehicle for constraining German as well as US force levels, and encouraging a decrease in defense spending in NATO. They probably hope thereby ultimately to affect NATO strategy and to obstruct possible future European defense cooperation. Security concerns have also accounted for the seriousness of the Soviet approach to nuclear proliferation.

27. Nevertheless, the Soviets recognize that the process of arms control negotiations is continuous, that periodic agreements are needed to sustain it, that they cannot always count on a favorable outcome at each stage, and that partial agreements can often advance their interests. And while they are prepared for prolonged bargaining, they would be highly dismayed at the prospect of a breakdown in the negotiating process, not only for its military consequences but also for its implications for detente and for Western concerns about Soviet military programs. These considerations played an important part in Moscow's agreement to the Vladivostok understanding; they proved willing to accept equal quantitative ceilings, requiring a slight reduction in their own forces, and to defer the question of forward-based systems, largely in order to sustain the momentum of SALT and detente after the US changed presidents in mid-1974. It is possible that such considerations also might lead the Soviets to be more forthcoming on SALT II after the new US administration comes into office.⁶

28. The Soviets will seek in coming years to draw the US and others into specific negotiations on some of the broad array of arms control proposals that they regularly purvey. These efforts will be meant to pursue the same political and military ends that SALT and MBFR now serve for them, plus broadening the agenda as insurance against the consequences of failure in any single forum.

III. THE PACE AND OBJECTIVES OF CURRENT SOVIET MILITARY PROGRAMING

29. In this section we examine Soviet military programing to see what definable objectives emerge from the evidence and whether the pace in recent years has increased, slowed down, or remained constant. We do not attempt a thorough description of these programs, which is available in other Estimates. From this standpoint we examine strategic

⁶ The Director, Defense Intelligence Agency, the senior officers of the Military Departments, and the Senior Intelligence Officer, Energy Research and Development Administration believe that, in sum, the Soviets are unlikely to make concessions in either SALT or MBFR unless, after extensive probing, they are convinced that concessions are required on their part to continue the detente process, keep the West from expanding its military capabilities, or score gains which they consider more important.

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offensive and defensive forces, ground and air forces facing NATO and China, naval forces, forces for distant intervention, and research and development activities.

Strategic Forces

30. The USSR, having succeeded over the past decade in overcoming a marked inferiority, continues to press forward with a broad and vigorous program for improving its strategic capabilities. In offensive forces:

- The ICBM force is becoming more survivable and flexible and better able to attack hard targets through deployment of a new generation of ICBMs (many with MIRVs) and through modifications to deployed systems and development of yet newer ones.
- The introduction of successive new models with longer-range missiles has increased the capability and survivability as well as the size of the SSBN force. Soviet SSBNs will, in the near future, acquire MIRVed missiles, and a new, large ballistic missile submarine may be under construction.
- In bomber aviation, older aircraft are being retained in service, the Backfire is being deployed, and there is evidence of the development of a new long-range bomber.

On the defensive side, the USSR continues:

- to expand capabilities for obtaining early warning of missile attack;
- to pursue developmental work on ABM systems;
- to improve capabilities against air attack, especially low-altitude attack;
- to search for ways to solve the antisubmarine warfare problem, including those based on novel possibilities;
- to improve, by hardening and other means, the protection of command and control facilities;
- to carry forward a civil defense program that is more extensive and better developed than was previously believed and that includes measures that, if effectively carried out, would have a significant impact on both US and Soviet

perceptions of the likely outcome of a nuclear exchange;⁷

- to acquire capabilities to interfere with US space systems.

31. The striking thing about these programs is not that they have accelerated in the last few years but that they have grown at a more or less steady pace for two decades. We expect this growth to continue. Neither the creation of an acknowledged deterrent nor the achievement of acknowledged strategic parity has caused the effort to falter. Soviet military doctrine calls for capabilities to fight, survive, and win a nuclear war. There is disagreement regarding the extent to which Soviet strategic policy and force developments are determined by this doctrine, but these programs are compatible with efforts to achieve these objectives. Soviet positions at SALT, in turn, do not rule out these same doctrinal objectives.⁸ But at the same time it must be recognized that, from the USSR's point of view, US military technology is so dynamic that constant Soviet efforts are needed even to keep pace, that US SALT positions do not constrain that dynamism, and that arms control measures to limit many qualitative advances appear in any event infeasible. Thus the Soviet stress has shifted considerably from quantity to quality.

32. We are divided in our views as to what objectives the Soviets have set for themselves in adding to their strategic capabilities.

33. In one view, Soviet strategic programs are fundamentally the result of decisions in support of Soviet strategic doctrine and objectives of obtaining a war-winning capability, and are not merely reactions to individual US weapon programs. These programs are extensive, embracing improvements in survivability and in counterforce capabilities, air defense and ABM development programs, and a broad hardening and civil defense effort, and each comple-

⁷ The Director, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State believes this statement exaggerates the likely impact of Soviet civil defense efforts. He believes that these efforts will not materially increase Soviet willingness to risk a nuclear exchange and will not undermine the deterrent value of US strategic attack forces.

⁸ The Director, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State believes this sentence could be misleading since Soviet positions at SALT are consistent with a broad range of possible objectives, including maintenance of rough equivalence with the U.S.

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ments the others. The Soviets see their extensive and growing research and development effort as supporting these programs in an increasingly effective fashion, and as enhancing the chances of technological breakthroughs.

34. In this view, Soviet strategic programs represent a serious Soviet commitment to obtain a strategic posture vis-a-vis the United States sufficient to win a nuclear war should it occur and to survive as a viable national entity. While it is uncertain when the Soviets expect to gain such strategic superiority, they now view this objective as practical and attainable in a programed fashion. They expect to move closer to this goal over the next ten years.⁹

35. Another view holds that the Soviet leadership does not at present regard the achievement of decisive strategic superiority as a feasible objective, particularly over the next decade. This view puts more stress on Soviet respect for present and potential US strategic strength as an ingredient in Moscow's projections. It also notes that failure thus far to solve such key problems as strategic missile defense and antisubmarine warfare are bound to have a discouraging effect on Soviet expectations.

36. Those who hold this view believe that the Soviets will be active, driving competitors in the strategic arms race, and will aim at such margins of superiority as are available. Their programs aim at the development of capabilities to fight and to survive nuclear war. But despite the comprehensive and vigorous character of these programs, the Soviet leaders know that the US need not concede the USSR a meaningful overall advantage, and they probably do not now count on gains that would be substantial enough to give them confidence about their ability to survive and win an all-out nuclear war. Nor can they now confidently expect to move substantially closer to these goals over the next ten years.

37. Beyond differing views about goals for strategic forces, there are differences about the broader goals of the USSR in the global balancing of forces in which strategic forces are only one factor—albeit probably

⁹ The Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, Department of the Air Force believes that the Soviets have additionally made great strides toward achieving general military superiority over all perceived constellations of enemies and for attaining a war-winning capability at all levels of conflict.

the most important one. We consider these broader issues further in the final section of this Estimate.

Forces Facing NATO

38. In the European theater, the Soviets aim at a capability that will enable them, should war occur, to prevail quickly at either the conventional or theater nuclear level. They see themselves as having superiority in conventional forces in Central Europe, but they are aware of the complexities and uncertainties that tactical air power and nuclear weapons introduce into such assessments. They are substantially improving forces for defending the seaward approaches to the Soviet Union and conducting offensive operations against NATO's northern and southern flanks and against the North Atlantic lines of communications. They are preparing for the possibility that, in the event of war, the Warsaw Pact would conduct major offensive operations without prior reinforcement from the USSR—and therefore with a minimum of warning; a forthcoming Estimate will examine this problem in detail.¹⁰ But, mindful of the unpredictability of nuclear conflict in particular and of the uncertainties about expansion to a broad European or intercontinental scale, they are inclined to be very cautious in considering the use of military force in Europe.

39. Enjoying a substantial quantitative advantage over NATO in such elements as divisions, tanks, artillery, and combat aircraft, the USSR conceives of future competition between the Warsaw Pact and NATO primarily in qualitative terms. In this regard, the Soviets are impressed by NATO's strengths and potential in such areas as antitank weapons, tactical nuclear weapons, and combat aircraft. Their own modernization programs cover a broad spectrum and

¹⁰ The Director, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State believes that this paragraph exaggerates the USSR's confidence in its theater forces against NATO. While the Soviet forces are formidable, there is a body of evidence that the Soviets are extremely conservative in their reckoning of the balance and that they believe they have reason to doubt whether their forces could succeed in carrying out the kind of massive offensive which Soviet strategy for a war in Europe requires.

He takes a different view of the significance of exercise scenarios in which reinforcement does not precede initiation of hostilities. In his view, the exercise evidence seems to fit better with the hypothesis that the West struck before the Soviets could reinforce than with the conclusion that the East chose to attack before reinforcement.

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feature greatly improved air defense systems, self-propelled artillery, and tactical aircraft with greater range and payload. The Soviets also have substantially increased the nuclear strike capabilities of their theater forces, providing them with new options for limited nuclear warfare at the theater level and reducing their dependence on USSR-based nuclear forces.

40. We assess the overall pace of Pact programs for improvement of conventional forces as steady and high. We doubt that the Soviets now expect a marked change in the present complex balance in the next decade. Their hopes for any such change rest primarily on political factors, such as a flagging of West European efforts or a weakening of the US commitment to NATO.¹¹

Forces Facing China

41. The main Soviet objectives in this region are:

- to deter the Chinese from provoking armed incidents or incursions in a region where Soviet cities and railroads are close to the border;
- to be capable of making a major ground thrust across the border, although not of occupying all China;
- to maintain a large lead in tactical and strategic nuclear capabilities;
- to maintain military pressure on Peking for a change in its hostile policies.

42. The buildup that began in the 1960s has evidently met these requirements, and the growth of Soviet forces in the Far East has slackened. The Soviets are, however, continuing to improve their Far Eastern naval forces capable of operations against Chinese domestic and foreign sea lines of communication. Throughout its course, this buildup was not allowed to affect significantly the development of forces facing NATO. Given their concerns over China,

¹¹ The Director, Defense Intelligence Agency, the senior intelligence officers of the Military Departments, and the Senior Intelligence Officer, Energy Research and Development Administration believe that the Soviets are striving for a marked change in their favor in the complex balance in Europe in the next decade by continued improvements in their current programs in nuclear, chemical, night fighting, mobility, electronic warfare, and mass fire capabilities. They believe Soviet expectation of political movement reinforces their hopes for such a change.

we doubt that the Soviets feel themselves able to plan to draw on these forces in the event of a European war, or vice versa; they seem instead to regard it as necessary to be able to fight on either front—or both together—with the forces already there. The future growth of Chinese nuclear capabilities will reinforce Soviet motivations to maintain and modernize their forces facing China.

General Purpose Naval Forces

43. In the decade following World War II, the Soviets' main objective in developing their general purpose naval forces was to acquire capabilities to defend Soviet coastal waters and key approaches from the open oceans against any naval force threatening the Soviet Union. Since the early 1960s, however, a pronounced shift in emphasis has taken place. The Soviets are now also developing forces capable of offensive action throughout the world oceans, maintaining a continuous long-term presence in the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean and increasing the range of their overseas involvements. These developments strongly suggest that the Soviets hold, as a continuing objective, the development of an open-ocean force capable of performing, to varying degrees, the traditional functions of major naval powers. The pace of this expansion has been measured and evolutionary, and is expected to continue unabated over the next decade, with somewhat greater emphasis on correction of their present deficiencies in logistic support forces to permit more flexible employment of their growing global capability. The result will be a broader range of options available to Soviet policymakers to use or threaten to use naval forces in pursuing their global interests.

Forces for Distant Operations

44. Soviet military objectives in this category derive from the USSR's view of the Third World as an arena of East-West struggle. The Soviets are convinced that, despite setbacks, these regions are shifting from the capitalist to the socialist camp, and that this process is contributing to Soviet national security. Two decades' experience of successes and failures, however, have given them a realistic view of the complexities of the Third World, and their behavior is pragmatic and alert to opportunities to exploit Western vulnerabilities.

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45. Among the means for expanding Soviet influence in this arena, military instruments have proven by far the most effective.

- Military assistance programs have built ties with a number of important states and political movements, resulting in dependence upon the USSR that has often, though not always, provided political leverage.
- Naval deployments into new waters have manifested the global scope of Soviet might and affected regional calculations of power.
- The USSR is able to airlift and sealift military aid to clients at war.
- It has some potential—as yet only marginally utilized—for intervening with its own forces in distant conflicts.

46. The Soviets have used these military instruments to provide assistance to its clients in Third World crises and have even intervened abroad with their own military forces. The Soviets have also endeavored to inhibit possible US actions and to provide a visible symbol of Soviet support by interposing naval forces. They have been concerned, however, not to confront Western interests in the Third World directly; thus they are working for change by providing military aid to legitimate governments and a number of guerrilla movements throughout the world.

47. The Soviets will continue to strongly support the process of change in the Third World and will expand their military instruments at a steady but moderate pace. Over the next decade, force improvements will continue to enhance Soviet capabilities to assist clients by supplementing local defenses. The USSR will be able to make more credible demonstrations of force and the Soviet navy will have better capabilities for interposition. The Soviets will also improve their capabilities for direct assault. But beyond the range of land-based air support, Soviet capabilities will still be deficient to carry out a direct assault against determined opposition by sizable armed forces.¹²

¹² The Director of Naval Intelligence, Department of the Navy notes that Soviet success and failure in any such intervention would be heavily affected by a number of other variables—particularly the stance of regional states and the disposition of the forces of the other major powers.

Research and Development

48. The inherent limitations of evidence present us with more uncertainty about the scope and progress of Soviet military research and development than about programs that have reached the stages of testing and deployment. It is nevertheless clear that R&D enjoys a particularly high priority.

49. The Soviets are well aware of the importance of basic scientific research, and they support it generously. They also have devoted major resources to building up industrial technology in support of R&D goals for the military and in space. They have decreased, but not eliminated, their dependence on foreign technology in such key areas as instrumentation and computers. Recent Soviet statements reflect special attention to the impact of technological developments on the strategic military balance.

50. In their approach to weapons development, the Soviets have traditionally emphasized long-term evolutionary development of existing system concepts or narrowly focused efforts to develop specific types of systems. While some of their programs in the past have involved innovative concepts and some of their deployed systems are technically advanced, until the mid-1960s they tended to concentrate on programs that had direct weapon system applications.

51. Since the mid-1960s, however, the Soviets have in addition embarked on a broader range of exploratory military R&D programs. This approach, while it runs the risk of a lower percentage of successful applications, offers the Soviets a better basis for evaluating Western technological efforts, a better base for the evolutionary development of existing systems, and improved chances for technological breakthroughs.

52. Prime examples of Soviet interest in revolutionary technological concepts are in the areas of ASW sensors and directed-energy weapons. In both ASW and high-energy lasers (HEL), the Soviets have an extensive R&D effort in progress, even though the potential in terms of practical weapons development is uncertain. The ASW efforts involve investigation of a variety of techniques that seemingly have limited prospects for success—detection of submarine wakes with radar, infrared, and nuclear-trace detectors; extremely low frequency electromagnetic sensors; and lasers. The Soviets are also conducting basic research

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in technologies relevant to the nonnuclear electromagnetic pulse and particle beam weapon concepts. Although there is a large body of evidence for the existence of a Soviet HEL weapons program, there is no such body of evidence on the other directed-energy concepts. Some of the laser work is being done under sponsorship of the air defense forces, but the development of HEL for practical applications is not likely before the 1980s.

53. There is little doubt that both their own ambitions and their fears of US advances will sustain a high-priority Soviet effort in military R&D during this period. The Soviets know a great deal more about the direction and progress of our military R&D than we do about theirs. Even so, the scientific and technological uncertainties that abound in this area almost certainly prevent them from reaching any confident judgment now as to whether, over the next ten years, either side will achieve breakthroughs that will be perceived as altering the strategic balance.

IV. SYNTHESIS

54. What, then, of the questions with which we began?

- Do the Soviet leaders now base policy—and the programs and activities which flow therefrom—on a belief that the USSR will become the world's strongest single power? Within the next ten years?
- Have they come to believe—or will they soon—that aggressive actions on their part carry lower risks than earlier, and that these risks have become low enough to be acceptable to prudent, yet ambitious men?

There is disagreement on some matters and agreement on others. In the latter category:

- The Soviet approach to the external world remains one of struggle between two systems, in which Moscow believes it will ultimately prevail.
- In prosecuting the struggle on multiple fronts, the Soviets see military power as a key instrument which can be used to attain strategic objectives without war.
- The Soviets aim at advantage in their military forces. However, they worry that they may fall

behind in the qualitative military competition, and this further reinforces the priority of their research and development effort.

- In the struggle, they are conscious of weaknesses on their own side, particularly those arising from economic and technological deficiencies and conflict with China. They are working to overcome these weaknesses, but they do not presently expect to remove them in the next decade.
- On the other hand, beyond their obvious military strength, they credit themselves with other important assets: disciplined policy-making, social cohesion, and perseverance.
- Since the Soviet strategies are not the same as those of the US, they do not seek to build forces corresponding to those of the US across the entire spectrum. For example, they place much higher priority on strategic forces and forces opposite NATO than on forces for distant military intervention.

Among our disagreements:

- Some judge that the Soviets are persuaded that the US and the West, despite periodic rebounds, are in a long-term decline that will be reflected in a flagging of political resolve, military efforts, and economic growth. Others think the Soviets hope for this but do not count on it, and indeed may think the US and Western military effort is again on the rise.
- Some believe that, in improving their military forces, the Soviets pursue the acquisition of a war-winning capability as a realistic objective. Others believe that the Soviets have no realistic expectation of attaining such a capability.

55. These disagreements lead to conclusions that, while not diametrically opposed, present significant differences of emphasis. The following discussion simplifies these differences by grouping them into two syntheses.

56. One line of argument holds that, in the Soviet view, the global correlation of forces has in the 1970s shifted in the USSR's favor and that this trend is likely to continue. The US and its allies have entered upon a new stage in the "general crisis of capitalism" that will prove irreversible even if there are periodic

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recoveries. The problems of the Soviet economy and the dispute with China are serious but, on the plane of international competition, not debilitating. In this situation, the Soviets aim to achieve the degree of military superiority over the West needed to permit them to wage and win a conventional or nuclear war. The Soviets see their improvements in survivability and in counterforce capabilities, air defense and ABM development, and broad hardening and civil defense programs in particular, and their improvements in conventional forces in general, as all contributing to this objective. While it is uncertain when the Soviets expect to gain such a decisive strategic superiority, they view this objective as practical and attainable in a programmed fashion. They expect to move closer to this goal over the next ten years. Although Soviet capabilities for the projection of military power will continue to have significant shortcomings within the foreseeable future, Moscow not only is prepared to employ its present naval, merchant, and air forces in seeking objectives in areas of high Soviet interest but also is developing additional forces more capable of influencing events in distant areas. This growing propensity to use military forces as instruments of foreign policy, coupled with the perceived favorable trend in the strategic balance, will, in the Soviets' view, increasingly enable them to deter US initiatives and to inhibit US opposition to Soviet initiatives, thereby advancing the overall Soviet strategic objective of gaining a dominant position in the world.

57. Another line of argument holds that, in Soviet thinking, the question is much more open. It too perceives an increased Soviet confidence, stemming much more from the achievement of parity in strategic forces than from other, nonmilitary trends. But this analysis holds that the Soviet leaders give greater weight than the preceding argument allows to the handicaps represented by the USSR's economic and technological weaknesses and its conflict with China. It believes that they attribute greater resilience

to the capitalist economies and do not discount the recent turnaround in US defense spending as a short-term phenomenon. In this view, Soviet military programing and research are bent upon keeping pace with that of its adversaries as well as seeking margins of advantage wherever feasible. But Moscow does not have a realistic expectation of achieving a war-winning capability, particularly in the next decade. Expecting Soviet foreign policy to be assertive, this analysis nonetheless holds that Moscow's experience with the complexities of the external world—and particularly with the intractable force of nationalism—does not at this point lead the Soviets to expect a series of advances that, by the mid-1980s, will cumulate into a finally decisive shift in the struggle. In short, this analysis attributes to the Soviets not a programmatic design for military superiority but a more pragmatic effort to achieve advantages where they can, and thus a more patient approach to continuing tough competition together with a dedication to high and steady levels of effort in the elements of power. Moscow's calculus of the risks attending forward action may decline, but this has not yet happened and, if it does, the process will be slow and subject to cautious testing.

* * *

58. This Estimate is obviously not a net assessment, not our judgment of the likely outcome in East-West competition. It is a summary of the range of Community perceptions of Soviet objectives and Soviet views of the prospects for significant gains in this competition. We agree on a wide range of Soviet objectives short of decisive military superiority over the West. Our differences are over the Soviet leaders' perception of the feasibility of achieving such superiority. Finally, we agree that Soviet risk-taking abroad in any specific situation will continue to be governed by Moscow's perception of interests and power at the particular time and place.

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